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uninhabited hill country. Communications by pack horse road are slow and rough, and as the transport of goods by this means becomes expensive for any considerable distance, each valley lives as far as possible off its own produce. In sharp contrast to this economic "autarky" the whole country is politically unified, being a province of the Chinese Republic and entirely subject to the authority of the provincial government in Yunnanfu (K'un Ming). The province is sub-divided into *hsien*, or Districts, somewhat smaller than an English county, and the area occupied by the Min Chia can be defined politically as the eight Districts of Ta Li, Feng Yi (Chao chou), Teng Ch'uan, Erh Yuan, Chien Ch'uan, Ho Ch'ing, Lan P'ing and Yun Lung. The area east of the lake falls partly within the jurisdiction of Pin Ch'uan, which is not mainly a Min Chia district, and similarly the districts of Lan P'ing and Yun Lung to the west contain areas not inhabited by Min Chia. The political boundaries do not follow racial limits, being based on geographical features.

It is more than six centuries since the conquest of the kingdom of Nan Chao by Kubla Khan, Emperor of the Yuan or Mongol dynasty, brought western Yunnan into the Chinese Empire, where it has since remained in spite of the changes of dynasty which followed. To what extent the kingdom of Nan Chao, which had its capital at Ta Li, can be described as a Min Chia kingdom will be discussed in a later chapter; here all that need be said is that it is certain that the inhabitants of the Ta Li plain, the Min Chia, were not barbarians at the time of the Chinese conquest, and this fact differentiates them from most of the other tribes of Yunnan. The Min Chia are rice farmers, occupying for choice the best rice lands available, only rarely dwelling on the mountains, and unskilled in the types of husbandry appropriate for mountaineers. Almost all the other non-

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able, and cotton growing could not be attempted there. Silk, which can also be conveniently and profitably transported long distances on mule back, has been suggested. A few families on the Ta Li plain have taken up cocoon raising, but the technique is not generally understood, there are no large groves of mulberry trees, and many years will be needed before the production of silk can be of any commercial importance. So far the Min Chia have found no alternative to the opium crop. The government, as is now well known, have completed the remarkable motor road from Yunnanfu to Burma, which is connected with Ta Li by a short branch. The road was built by forced labour and as a war measure. A railway, which however will not pass within forty miles of Ta Li, is now under construction. The eventual benefits of these improved communications will no doubt be felt by the Min Chia, but at present they are more conscious of the demands on their time and energies.

The suppression of opium has therefore left the Min Chia for the present at the mercy of the rice standard, unalleviated by any cash crop raised for export. It is the working of this almost closed economy, as yet unaffected by any serious volume of intercourse with the outside world, which forms the subject of this chapter. Since rice is the dominating factor in this system it must have pride of place.

The method of rice cultivation is well known, nor do the Min Chia differ in this respect from other rice growing peoples. The rice is grown in seed beds planted in the latter part of March, the second lunar month, when frost need no longer be expected. The fields are cleared of the wheat and bean crop in May, and are then ploughed in readiness for the flooding, which is either effected by irrigation on land nearest the mountain, or by the monsoon rains which begin, on the average, at the end of May. As soon as the fields are flooded the rice seedlings are transplanted from the seed

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CHAPTER 10

ON THE ROAD

491 489 "GOOD for ten years, bad for ten thousand"—the old Chinese proverb aptly characterises the stone-paved caravan paths which are the only roads of Yunnan. To modern ideas there are no real roads in Yunnan at all, except the motor road to Burma built in the past two years. That, indeed, is the only road on which wheeled vehicles can pass. But, as the English word "road" implies, a road was once a track primarily for riding, not for vehicles. Goods passed on pack animals not in carts, and this ancient manner of travel is still the daily practice of Yunnan. Once it is recognised that travel means walking or riding at a foot's pace, and that roads are any track along which a pack pony can pick its way, then all journeys are long and slow, but no place is really inaccessible.

438 484 Consequently, the people of Yunnan, the Min Chia and their neighbours, do intercommunicate, although to the stranger the country appears to be almost impassable. It is really the indomitable Chinese trader who has opened up these difficult and precarious communications, for the indigenous population left to themselves would probably have remained isolated. The Chinese merchant and, to a lesser extent, the Chinese government, built the bridges without which the rivers, too deep to ford, and too swift to ferry, would have been impassable. They built them with the labour of the native population to serve the needs of the ruling race, as is commonly the case in all colonial development. Trade is still in the hands of the immigrant Chinese merchants, and though the personnel of the official class is drawn from all the civilised races of Yunnan its spirit and

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their only labour is to steer, or in calms, to punt. They often prefer to travel at night because in summer there is more wind after sundown, and if the wind fails it is tiring to have to do the hard work of punting or rowing in the hot sun. As they work, or sit idly steering the slow-moving boat, they beguile the time by singing improvised words to the one tune which Min Chia peasants always sing to. Time is no object. A trip from Shier Yu, the port of Ta Li, to Wa Shih or Shang Kuan may take four hours or less with a favourable wind, or seventeen hours if there is no wind at all. As they carry a cooking stove and provision of rice they are not dependent on the villages for food, while fish can often be bought from the fishermen on the lake itself.

The length and slowness of all travel in Yunnan is in fact the explanation of that indifference to time and punctuality which disturbs the foreign visitor. When a journey must in any case take several days, one more or less cannot matter, and as long as the stage point is reached in time for supper, it does not matter when the traveller starts. No Yunnanese would think of starting on a journey unless he allowed for a possible week's delay, through bad weather or—formerly a paramount consideration—delay due to unsafe roads and banditry. When the roads were still infested with robbers it was not uncommon for all travellers to wait in the last town below some dangerous pass until the authorities agreed to provide an escort, or until there were sufficient wealthy travellers assembled to pay for one. My arrival in one such town, some ten years ago, was hailed with delight, since I already had the escort which the local authorities were unwilling to provide for nearly fifty or sixty other travellers and four caravans of forty mules. All these, the next day, got safe and free escort over the pass which was known to be the haunt of a large gang of deserters from the provincial army.

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177 seas Italy and Germany would attack us in the west. One cannot ask for more knowledge of the outer world than that.

177 489 Against these factors making for change one must set the massive forces of inertia which will limit and modify any influence from outside. First of these is the difficulty and inaccessibility of the country. There is the road to Burma and K'un Ming ; one road, long, expensive and difficult, and this is the only direct link with the outer world. The new Burma-Yunnan railway, which will be completed in a few years' time, will not pass within fifty miles of Min Chia country. These modern means of communication in any case only affect the lives of a handful of the rich, being mainly built for national rather than provincial purposes. The mass of the Min Chia will never ride in a bus to K'un Ming or Burma, if only because they could never afford to do so. Yunnan, being very mountainous, is not a country which can be rapidly opened up by the introduction of motor transport, as on the plains of India and north China. The existing routes are useless for any wheeled vehicle and the making of motor roads is a most elaborate and difficult engineering feat. Except for the road to Burma, which is a national war measure, there are no routes through Yunnan carrying a sufficient volume of trade to justify these expensive public works, consequently it is unlikely that any other large-scale motor roads will be built in western Yunnan for several years.

The only reason for which it would be worth while to open up western Yunnan by such roads would be if a large tourist traffic existed, such as pays for the mountain roads of Switzerland or California. Tourists indeed would find Yunnan a paradise if these communications existed, but it is extremely unlikely that such a traffic will come into being for at least fifty years more. Yunnan is very far from such

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large centres of wealth as exist in eastern Asia. It is more than a week's journey from Shanghai by steamer and train. The distance from Calcutta is about the same, and the lesser centres such as Rangoon or Singapore are all unable to support a large tourist traffic.

Western Yunnan is therefore likely to remain almost an unknown and rarely visited land, even by the Chinese from other provinces. At the present time the refugees from occupied or devastated China have only reached western Yunnan in small numbers, and were peace to be restored, few of them would stay in a country where very little money can be earned. This factor, the poverty of the country, is the other main obstacle to the forces of change. Until western Yunnan can find a product which can be exported cheaply and fetch a good price in the world market—a substitute for opium in fact—the people must remain poor. While communications remain bad such a product is hard to find, but communications cannot be much improved until the country can afford to pay the great expenses necessary. From this vicious circle there is no easy escape.

The natural conservatism of the common people is a factor against change which can easily be overrated. The events of the last twenty-five years have disproved the old belief that the Chinese were a conservative race. Their government until the fall of the Manchus was intensely opposed to any change, and the people followed its lead ; under the republican government, which requires changes, the people, equally, have obeyed the orders given by their rulers. The rapid disappearance of such customs as foot binding, the total disappearance of the queue, prove how little the Chinese are attached to old social customs, while the complete absence of royalist feeling or any interest in the old monarchy shows how easily they will submit to